



Shenandoah Energy Advisors

March 4, 2025

House of Delegates Environment and Transportation Committee
Chair Marc Korman
Vice Chair Regina T. Boyce
250 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am writing in support of House Bill 1181 that would establish a Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care. The task force would study issues and estimate costs related to establishing a State Park dedicated to providing recreational opportunities and therapeutic services to veterans.

I see major advantages for the State of Maryland in establishing a task force to conduct a comprehensive analysis of this proposed project:

- This is an opportunity to create a successful public-private partnership that addresses two of Governor Wes Moore's major priorities: veterans' care and mental health support.
- On the private sector side, there are several attractive financial sources for various aspects of the park:
 - Donation of the land in Washington County to a not-for-profit organization highly experienced in caring for veterans' mental health issues by holding clinics, conferences and retreats for veterans and their families.
 - Capital costs for construction could primarily come from private sector resources. Already, there have been commitments from local construction businesses to help build a center and lodging rooms.
 - Ongoing operating costs could be derived from renting these facilities to not-for-profits for their veterans' program – conferences, retreats, etc. I understand that serious interest has been expressed by two such organizations.
- Outstanding location for a veterans' retreat and conference center. This site in Washington County has natural beauty on the Potomac River across from Harper's Ferry, access from the DC metropolitan area by rail and highway, and proximity to other major national and state parks (Harper's Ferry National Park, C&O Canal National Park, Antietam Battlefield National Park, Appalachian Trail National Park, and Gambrill State Park. These parks provide a host of programs and opportunities that would serve veterans' health care.



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- Close access to Veterans Administration healthcare expertise at the Martinsburg VA Center in Martinsburg WV.
- This could be marketed as the first state park in the nation dedicated to Veterans care and put Maryland at the forefront of assisting healthcare for veterans and their families.

My interest and support for this project is based on my background: Vietnam combat veteran with 2 Purple Hearts; US Military Academy graduate (1969); and owner of a veteran small business, Shenandoah Energy Advisors, LLC.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my support for House Bill 1181.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas R. Wheelock
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